

MORE THAN A MOTTO



WHAT KEEPS A TEAM TOGETHER DESPITE THE HARDSHIPS OF OPERATIONS AND THE WORRIES OF THE HOME FRONT?

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When I received my skippy badge after finishing infantry IET at Singleton, I read its motto, "Duty First"! I heard the duty-first call from angry sergeants dispelling whingeing-digger syndrome or at army history lectures but, at that time, I really didn't grasp or appreciate it. Even though I respected the badge's significance, the history behind it and the corps it represents, I felt I hadn't done enough to understand the real sacrifices its motto engenders.

But that was then and this is now.

I have seen what 'duty first' is all about.

I am not going to call them a platoon or even sections, for that would not do justice to the qualities that have developed over 15 months of training and operations together. I will simply call them a team, for they have all the qualities a winning team has – mateship, respect, motivation, professionalism, compassion, humour, unity and toughness – physical and mental.

I am writing about 'the team' because I am proud of them, not because they have done anything extraordinary, but because they did their job and did it well.

When the majority came together in September 2005, little did they know they wouldn't be home until May 2007.

This is not an exaggeration – it's a sign of the times, a reflection of how busy the Australian Defence Force is.

These days, soldiers can expect to be away from home for extended periods on training or on operations. 6RAR has been in three different operational theatres in the past 12 months alone. This on top of running IET (initial employment training) courses for new recruits back home.

These long stints away from home can cause individuals many problems and sometimes these can affect the running of a team. In our team we had individuals suffer marriage break ups, miss the birth of children, miss the first year of a child's life and have loved ones fall ill. Back home, wives and girlfriends coped with the dread of the unknown, giving birth and looking after the house, finances and children – in one case, three young kids and the birth of a fourth.

With all this going on, and the team living out of each others pockets for 15 months and working in a dangerous operational theatre, you might expect something to snap.

Well, it didn't.

The team stuck together through every challenge. Whatever the task, simple or demanding, they produced the goods every time.

'Duty first' is not just a motto, it's a tool for survival. It teaches you to rely on your training, your mates, your leaders and, most importantly, yourself. 'Duty first' teaches you to hold strong, to go on and go further to achieve your goals. It doesn't matter if you're a recruit in training or on patrol in a foreign land, 'duty first' will help overcome individual and team obstacles.



Above and right: Private Jonathon Morison on patrol in Afghanistan

As mentioned, individuals had problems back home. Unfortunately this comes with the job. Personal problems were discussed, resolved, or just had to wait until the mission was complete. It's a harsh reality that people in the ADF face. But team unity, mateship and professionalism help them through.

What also helped were the positives and the goals they achieved. Among them – the first infantry platoon to come under engineer command since Vietnam and the first infantry call sign to conduct patrols in Afghanistan.

Also remarkable was that, of a team comprising 30 men, not one permanent injury was suffered nor a whole day lost through injury or illness.

The team was a critical part of 1RTF's (Reconstruction Task Force) success. They performed to a high standard, both as a team and individually – and always put duty first.

Now that the team is heading home to their battalion and families, individuals will head in different directions, seeking new challenges. Some will return to civilian life, some will be posted or promoted and the rest will go back to D Coy.

Most importantly, though, they will return to families and friends, who, in most cases, have weathered their own storms while their soldiers have been away, serving Australia.

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